

## Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-05 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00  
INR-07 NSAE-00 DODE-00 PRS-01 /050 W  
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R 192145Z JUL 77  
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5112  
INFO AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL  
AMEMBASSY LA PAZ  
AMEMBASSY LIMA  
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO  
USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 QUITO 4828

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, EC  
SUBJECT: GOE RETURN TO CIVILIAN RULE

REF: A) STATE 155911; B) STATE 161242; C) QUITO 4621

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. THE FOLLOWING POLITICAL ANALYSIS IS  
A CONTINUATION OF AND UPDATE TO A SERIES OF MESSAGES  
ABOUT THE PROCESS CURRENTLY UNDERWAY TO RETURN ECUADOR  
TO CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT. THE ASSESSMENT INCORPORATES  
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS RAISED IN REFTELS A AND B. NEARLY  
ALL POLITICAL ACTORS NOW SEEM TO BE CONVINCED THAT THE  
MILITARY IS SINCERE IN ITS PLAN TO RESTORE CONSTITUTIONAL  
GOVERNMENT, AND IN THE LAST WEEK POLITICAL MANUEVERING  
AND EFFORTS AT FORMING ELECTORAL COALITIONS HAVE GREATLY  
INTENSIFIED. THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT THE MILITARY'S  
WILLINGNESS TO CARRY ITS PLANS FOR RETORNO THROUGH  
ELECTIONS AND TO THE ASSUMPTION OF POWER BY AN  
ELECTED PRESIDENT DEPENDS LARGELY ON THE MILITARY'S  
BELIEF THAT THE PROCESS WILL NOT RESULT IN THE ELECTION  
OF POPULIST ASSAD BUCARAM. THE EMBASSY'S ANALYSIS IS  
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THAT BUCARAM COULD BE ELECTORALLY DEFEATED BY ONE OF  
SEVERAL POTENTIAL CANDIDATES SUPPORTED BY A BROAD  
POLITICAL COALITION. WE CONSIDER THE RETURN OF  
ECUADOR TO CIVILIAN, CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT TO BE  
IN THE U.S. INTEREST, AND WITH THE AIM OF ENCOURAGING  
THE MILITARY TO CARRY THE PROCESS THROUGH TO ITS  
CONCLUSION WE HAVE CAREFULLY SHARED OUR VIEW

THAT BUCARAM COULD BE DEFEATED WITH A FEW SELECTED ECUADORIAN LEADERS. END SUMMARY.

2. WHILE IT IS STILL FASHIONABLE IN SOME POLITICAL CIRCLES TO PROFESS SKEPTICISM ABOUT THE "RETORNO" PROCESS, NEARLY ALL MAJOR POLITICAL ELEMENTS SEEM TO BE PERSUADED AT THIS POINT THAT THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT IS SINCERE IN ITS CURRENT PLAN TO HAND GOVERNMENT BACK TO THE CIVILIANS WITHIN A YEAR. THE EXCEPTIONS ARE DIEHARDS LIKE THE VESASQUISTAS, THE FOLLOWERS OF CARLOS JULIO AROSEMENA, AND SOME MINOR FACTIONS.. MANY ECUADOREAN NOTABLES, SUCH AS GALO PLAZA, WHILE DUBIOUS ABOUT THE SPECIFICS OF THE GOVERNMENT PLAN, ARE PARTICIPATING WHOLEHEARTEDLY IN THE PROCESS IN THE VIEW THAT WHILE NOT IDEAL, THE PLAN OFFERS THE ONLY REAL POSSIBILITY FOR RETURN TO CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT AT THIS TIME. PERHAPS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE BELIEF IN THE SINCERITY OF THE TRIUMVIRATE IS THE CHANGE WE HAVE NOTED OVER THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS IN THE OPINION THAT THE MECHANISM PUT INTO GEAR BY THE MILITARY WILL ACTUALLY WORK. AS A RESULT OF THIS PERCEPTION, POLITICIANS HAVE BEGUN TO REALIZE THAT NOT ONLY IS THERE A HIGH PROBABILITY THAT THEY WILL BE INVOLVED IN FULL-SCALE ELECTION CAMPAIGNS AS SCHEDULED, BUT THAT TIMING OF THE ELECTORAL CALENDAR BEHOOVES THEM TO PREPARE AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE TO FACE THAT ELECTION. CONFIDENTIAL

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THE EMERGENCE OF SEVERAL SERIOUS PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES AND THE BACKSTAGE WHEELING AND DEALING REGARDING COALITIONS IN THE PAST TEN DAYS ARE EVIDENCE OF THIS REALIZATION.

3. THE KEY TO THE SUCCESS OF THE PROCESS REVOLVES AROUND THE CANDIDACY OF ASSAD BUCRAM. EFFORTS TO BLOCK HIS CANDIDACY DURING THE CONSTITUTIONAL DRAFTING PROCESS FAILED. WHILE THERE STILL EXISTS THE POSSIBILITY OF A CHALLENGE TO BUCARAM'S ECUADOREAN BIRTH CERTIFICATE (PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES MUST BE NATIVE BORN ECUADOREANS ACCORDING TO BOTH CONSTITUTIONS), THE SUPREME ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL, HEADED BY FORMER PRESIDENT GALO PLAZA, IS KNOWN TO BE FAVORABLE TO PRINCIPLE OF LETTING BUCARAM RUN, AND WILL DECIDE ON THIS QUESTION IF IT IS RAISED. THE DECISION BY THE DRAFTING COMMISSIONS TO PERMIT BUCARAM'S CANDIDACY HAS, IN THE MINDS OF MANY, LEGITIMIZED THE PUTATIVE ELECTION AND ENHANCED ITS SIGNIFICANCE. IN THE OPINION OF MANY OF THOSE OPPOSED TO BUCARAM PERSONALLY, THE RISK OF BUCARAM'S WINNING IS PARTIALLY OFF-SET BY THE TREMENDOUS PRESTIGE THAT WOULD BE ACCRUED TO THE CANDIDATE WHO WAS ABLE TO BEAT HIM. THIS IN ITSELF MIGHT GIVE MOMENTUM TO THE

NEW CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER SUFFICIENT TO RESTRAIN THE  
MILITARY FROM INTERVENING AGAIN FOR PERHAPS SEVERAL YEARS.

4. THE MILITARY, AS AN INSTITUTION, IS KNOWN TO BE  
OPPOSED, AND RATHER VEHEMENTLY SO, TO THE POSSIBILITY  
OF A BUCARAM PRESIDENCY. HOWEVER, WHETHER THE MILITARY  
WILL STEP IN BEFORE THE ELECTION WILL DEPEND ON  
A) HOW COMPLETE THE CONSENSUS TO ACT IS WITHIN THE  
OFFICER RANKS, AND B) THEIR PERCEPTION OF HOW PROBABLE  
BUCARAM'S ELECTION IS. THIS SECOND POINT IS HIGHLY  
CRITICAL SINCE THERE ARE VERY STRONG COUNTERVAILING  
PRESSURES ON THE MILITARY TO KEEP THEIR WORD AND RETIRE  
FROM GOVERNMENT RULE UNLESS UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES DICTATE  
OTHERWISE. FURTHER, THE LONGER THE MILITARY DELAYS  
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IN ARRIVING AT THE CONCLUSION THAT NOTHING CAN STOP  
BUCARAM LEGALLY, THE MORE DIFFICULT IT WILL BECOME FOR THEM TO  
INTERVENE AT ALL IN VIEW OF THE COMMITMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS  
REGARDING THE RETURN TO CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT WHICH  
PROGRESSIVELY HEM THE MILITARY LEADERSHIP IN AT EVERY  
NEW STAGE OF THE RETORNO PROCESS. IN OTHER WORDS,  
THE LONGER THE MILITARY BELIEVES THAT BUCARAM CAN  
BE DEFEATED LEGITIMATELY, THE GREATER THE CHANCES ARE  
THAT A CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT WILL ACTUALLY TAKE OFFICE.

5. WE HAVE SUBMITTED IN OUR PARM AND COMMENTED  
ELSEWHERE THAT A RETURN TO CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT IN  
ECUADOR SERVES OUR INTERESTS. WHILE WE SHOULD ESCHEW  
ANY ACTIONS THAT MIGHT BE CONSTRUED AS INTERVENTION,  
WE SHOULD ATTEMPT TO PROMOTE DEMOCRACY DISCREETLY AND  
IDENTIFY OURSELVES WITH IT AS NEARLY AS POSSIBLE.  
SINCE THIS WAS THE PRINCIPAL THEME OF MRS. CARTER'S  
VISIT HERE, WE MUST ASSUME THAT THIS POLICY IS SUPPORTED  
AT THE HIGHEST USG LEVELS. ONE OF THE UNIQUE INSTRUMENTS  
THAT WE HAVE IN AFFECTING THE PROCESS IS THE CREDIBILITY  
OF THE EMBASSY'S POLITICAL ANALYSIS IN THE EYES OF  
KEY MILITARY AND CIVILIAN POLITICIANS; THEY VIEW US  
AS INTERESTED, AS HAVING THE RESOURCES TO COLLECT AND  
ANALYZE, AND AS BEING FREE FROM INTELLECTUAL BIAS. WE  
ARE CAREFULLY USING THIS DEVICE, WHEN THE OPPORTUNITY  
ARISES WITH SELECTED PERSONS, TO CONVEY INFORMALLY  
THE IMPRESSION THAT IN OUR OPINION BUCARAM IS BEATABLE.  
(AT THE SAME TIME, WE HAVE AN EXCELLENT RELATIONSHIP WITH  
BUCARAM AND FEEL THAT IN THE EVENT THAT HE  
COMES TO POWER OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS SHOULD NOT BE  
AFFECTED BY THE ABOVE MENTIONED EXCHANGES.)

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INR-07 NSAE-00 DODE-00 PRS-01 /050 W  
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R 192145Z JUL 77  
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5113  
INFO AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL  
AMEMBASSY LA PAZ  
AMEMBASSY LIMA  
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO  
USCINCSO QUARRY HTS CZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 QUITO 4828

6. IN OUR EXCHANGES WITH OTHERS ON BUCARAM WE HAVE DELIBERATELY RAISED QUESTIONS ABOUT HIS BEING UNTESTED IN ANY CONSTITUENCY LARGER THAN THE PROVINCE OF GUAYAS, THE EQUAL POPULARITY OF LIBERAL CONTENDER FRANCISCO (PANCH) HUERTA IN ROUGHLY THE SAME CONSTITUENCY THE LAST TIME ELECTIONS WERE HELD (1970), BUCARAM'S FAILURE TO ATTRACT A RESPECTABLE AUDIENCE WHEN HE HELD A RALLY IN QUITO A FEW MONTHS AGO, HIS DETERIOATED PHYSICAL CONDITION, THE ADVENT OF TELEVISION AS A MAJOR CAMPAIGN MEDIUM WHICH WILL PRESUMABLY FAVOR "COOLER" CANDIDATES, AND DOUBTS ABOUT THE EXTENT OF BUCARAM'S APPEAL TO THE 900,000 YOUNG VOTERS WHO HAVE ENTERED THE VOTING LISTS FOR THE FIRST TIME. WE BELIEVE THAT THIS LOW-KEY CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN FAIRLY SUCCESSFUL THUS FAR, AS WITNESSED BY THE ARGUMENTS COMING FULL CIRCLE IN A FEW INSTANCES AND BEING ATTRIBUTED TO OUR INTERLOCUTORS. OF COURSE, WITHOUT ANY HELP FROM US, THE ANALYSIS STANDS OF ITS OWN WEIGHT AND SEEMS TO BE ENJOYING A GROWING ACCEPTANCE HERE. ADMIRAL POVEDA, FOR INSTANCE, REFLECTED THESE THOUGHTS IN HIS CONVERSATION WITH THE ARA/AND ACTING DIRECTOR.

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7. THE CONCENTRATION OF POPULAR FORCES FORMALLY ENDORSED "DON BUCA" AT ITS CONVENTION LAST WEEK. BECAUSE OF THE

IMPONDERABLES CITED IN THE PREVIOUS PARAGRAPH ABOUT THE POTENTIAL STRENGTH OF BUCARAM IN THE FIRST NATIONAL ELECTION SINCE 1968, IT IS DIFFICULT, IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE TO PREDICT WHAT WILL HAPPEN AT THE POLLS NEXT SPRING IF THE TRANSITION PROCESS CHUGS ON. IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION RAISED IN REF A), WE BELIEVE THAT IN THIS REGARD POVEDA HAS AS MUCH PURCHASE ON POLITICAL REALITY AS MOST POLITICAL OBSERVERS, AND BASED UPON OUR ASSESSMENT OF HIS PERSONAL INTELLECTUAL QUALITIES, PROBABLY A GOOD DEAL MORE THAN MOST. ONE THING, HOWEVER, THAT ALL AGREE UPON IS THAT IF BUCARAM IS TO BE BEATEN, HE WILL BE BEATEN BY MEANS OF A COALITION OF SEVERAL MAJOR AND MINOR PARTIES. THAT BOTH DRAFT CONSTITUTIONS CALL FOR THE ELECTION OF A PRESIDENT BY AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY WHICH WILL PROBABLY LEAD TO A SECOND, RUN-OFF ELECTION, FURTHER ENCOURAGES THIS THINKING.

8. DURING THE PAST TEN DAYS EFFORTS TO FORGE POTENTIAL COALITIONS HAVE PICKED UP STEAM. THE LIBERALS, WHO REST IN THE CENTER OF THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM, ARE CONSIDERED THE LINCH-PIN OF SUCH EFFORTS AND THEY HAVE ALREADY ALLIED THEMSELVES WITH THE SMALL, BUT PRESTIGIOUS, UNIFIED SOCIALIST PARTY AND SEVERAL MINOR PERSONALISTIC GROUPS. MEANWHILE, THE CONSERVATIVES ON THE CENTER-RIGHT ARE EAGERLY PURSUING A COALITION WITH THE LIBERALS, AND THE LIBERALS HAVE FANNED OUT THEIR EMISSARIES TO BOTH THE CENTER-RIGHT AND CENTER-LEFT IN ORDER TO ESTABLISH THE BROADEST POSSIBLE ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENT. ONE OF THE LIBERAL  
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POSSIBILITIES, RAUL CLEMENTE HUERTA WHO IS IN THE POSITION OF BEING ABLE TO OBTAIN HIS PARTY'S NOMINATION IF HE WANTS IT) IS DEMANDING NOTHING LESS THAN A COALITION EMBRACING ALL OF THESE GROUPS AS THE SINE QUA NON OF HIS CANDIDACY.

9. OF OTHER CANDIDATES, THE CONSERVATIVES HAVE OFFERED THE LIBERALS THE NAMES OF QUITO MAYOR SIXTO DURAN BALLEEN AND BANKER-POLITICIAN JAIME ACOSTA VELASCO AND HAVE ASKED IN TURN FOR LIBERAL NAMES TO CONSIDER. WHILE DURAN BALLEEN IS RATHER MORE ATTRACTIVE TO THE LIBERALS AND CENTER-LEFT THAN ACOSTA, THE LATTER, AS THE NEPHEW OF VELASCO IBARRA, IS STRENGTHENED BY THE POSSIBILITY OF HIS APPEAL TO THE OLD VELASQUISTA CONSTITUENCY. (HOW IMPORTANT VELASQUISTA SUPPORT MIGHT BE IS SPECULATIVE IN VIEW OF THE FRAGMENTATION AND POSSIBLE DISINTEGRATION THAT HAVE OCCURRED IN THE GROUP RECENTLY AS IT HAS BECOME CLEAR THAT THE OCTOGENERIAN VELASCO WILL NOT AGAIN BE A

PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE (REF C). LEFT OF CENTER GROUPINGS CONSISTING OF THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS, THE PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVES, AND THE FOLLOWERS OF EX-AMBASSADOR TO THE US. JOSE C. CARDENAS, ANNOUNCED THEIR MUTUAL COOPERATION A FEW DAYS AGO. THIS GROUP IS PROBABLY THE EMERGING NEW ELEMENT THAT POVEDA MENTIONED TO THE DIRECTOR OF ARA/AND AND NOTED TO THE AMBASSADOR AND DCM SOME MONTHS AGO. THE CENTER-LEFT AGGLOMERATION SEEMS TO BE PUSHING CARDENAS. THE IMPORTANT LIBERAL SPLINTER, THE DEMOCRATIC LEFT PARTY (IZQUIERDA DEMOCRATICA) HAS REMAINED ALOOF FROM THESE FUSION EFFORTS, THUS FAR, BUT ABDON CALDERON OF THE MUCH SMALLER LIBERAL SPLINTER ALFARISTA RADICAL FRONT PARTY HAS ANNOUNCED HIS CANDIDACY. THE COMMUNIST PARTY (LOSCOW-LINE), THE REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISTS (HAVANA-LINE) PLUS OTHER RADICAL GROUPS ARE INVOLVED IN A FRENTE AMPLIO DE LA IZQUIERDA, WHICH SHOULD HAVE LITTLE DIRECT INFLUENCE ON THE ELECTORAL PROCESS.

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10. ANTICIPATING THE POLITICAL CAMPAIGN AND ELECTION FROM THIS DISTANCE, THE US FINDS ITSELF IN THE FORTUNATE POSITION OF NOT HAVING TO CONCERN ITSELF TOO MUCH--IN TERMS OF OUR BILATERAL INTERESTS--ABOUT WHICH CANDIDATE WILL EVENTUALLY BE CHOSEN: NONE OF THE SERIOUS POSSIBILITIES (INCLUDING BUCARAM) HAVE EXPRESSED ANYTHING BUT A DESIRE FOR GREATER ACCOMMODATION WITH US. WHILE THE CAMPAIGN ITSELF COULD PRODUCE NATIONALISTIC ISSUES WHICH MIGHT CHANGE THIS ESTIMATE, AT THIS POINT WE MUST REGARD THE CHANCES OF GETTING TO THE INAUGURATION ITSELF AND THE POTENTIAL STABILITY OF THE ENSUING CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT AS OUR MAJOR AREAS OF ATTENTION.

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